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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses some of the problems that arise for students and instructors in the teaching of the linguistics of a language to students in the process of learning that language as a second language (L2). Because non-native speakers may not have reached terminal competence in the L2, the language being presented in linguistics classes as examples of linguistic phenomena may be used by the student as a form of input to the acquisition process. Another difficulty is that non-native speakers may have reached a stage of acquisition in the L2 where their knowledge has become fossilized--when new linguistic forms are no longer being acquired. The question of linguistic intuition in first-language (L1) and L2 students is also considered. Linguistics instructors can help alleviate these difficulties by: (1) informing students that their knowledge of the L2 will not necessarily be improved by learning about the language from standard texts; (2) setting up courses that enable comparisons of the linguistic characteristics of the L1 and L2 to be made; and (3) trying to use material that is familiar to the students. Contains 10 references. (MDM)

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The Teaching of Linguistics in the L2 Medium.

by

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Introduction

Teaching linguistics in the L2 medium can be difficult for a number of reasons. There is a lot of technical vocabulary and many different theoretical perspectives. There is usually a need to resort to exemplification of various linguistic phenomena in different languages. But such difficulties are not too different from the problems facing teachers and students of any academic subject in a 2nd language medium. Concern here is with the task facing L2 learners, who have previously been instructed in a classroom, being taught the linguistics of their L2, using text books and other materials in that language. They will be involved in examining the language structure rather than being told what the structure is, as would happen in a language teaching class. It may be easier to study the linguistics of a language which is completely unknown to you than to examine one which is partially known to you, and of which you might be expected to know some of the rules because you can use them.

Many adult L2 learners who are specialising in their L2, especially to become L2 teachers, need to learn something about the linguistics of that language. A course in the linguistics of the language should be a way of finding out about its grammatical and phonological properties. In fact, it would not be advisable to consider teaching the subject without knowing something of its general organisation. Learning the linguistics, however, will involve the learner with complex and unusual forms of the language. The student will also be expected to make his/her own judgments about rules and language forms.

Native speakers are not conscious of the grammar and sound rules of their native language while they are using it. However, they can bring certain intuitions to consciousness when learning the linguistics of their language. They have the "authority" to say whether they think such and such an utterance is a part of their language. This kind of tacit knowledge is exploited by linguists in their texts, particularly those working within a generative framework, in order to express generalisations. This does not necessarily mean native speakers have conscious knowledge of the rules of their language. An L2 speaker who has received most of his or her knowledge from a language classroom might have more such knowledge than a native speaker. But such a speaker has always been told what is wrong or right in the L2 by a teacher, an external authority.

Also, L2 learners may still be in a state where they are still acquiring the language rather than being in a position of knowing it. What is more, the intuitions of a non-native speaker can be different from those of a native speaker, so appeal to intuitive knowledge could easily miss its mark. Non-native speakers learning the linguistics of their L2 may therefore have problems processing the linguistic examples they are presented with, which may in some cases hamper or limit their understanding of the subject.

Learning to use a new language for the purpose of communicating is essentially a very different task from learning about the linguistics of that language. In a language course, attempts are made to take account of the learner's competence. Material is presented judiciously to the student to aid comprehensibility and to facilitate the development of competence in the language. In the study of linguistics, language is presented to show the workings of a particular theory, to exemplify a rule and to show exceptions to rules. In linguistics texts, there are no limits on complexity, or on unusual vocabulary, or on whether the language would be used in the real world. In fact, you would be more likely to find linguistic oddities in a

linguistics text than you would anywhere else. Certainly, any language used is presented out of context, making it virtually meaningless and difficult to judge. None of this need provide a problem for the native speaker of the language, but it could well be difficult for an L2 speaker.

Teaching the linguistics of the L2 to non-native speakers in the L2 medium is different from teaching other content subjects to non-native subjects in the L2. The language cannot easily be tailored to suit their level of understanding. The students are suddenly expected to be fully in control of something they were previously taught about. Their unconscious knowledge of the language may be still in a process of development, and their intuitions about the language could be different from native speakers. My concerns are mainly with these last two points.

1) The non-native speaker may not have reached terminal competence in the L2. This could mean that the language being presented as examples of linguistic phenomena may be used by the L2 student as a form of "input" to the acquisition process. Input has been found to have effects on the acquisition process of both L1 and L2.

2) The non-native speaker may have reached a stage of acquisition of the language where his/her knowledge has become "fossilised" ie, new forms are no longer being acquired. But the intuitions about the L2 may be different from those of native speakers which means they would have difficulty following arguments which relied on evidence drawn from them.

We will consider the problems with the first possibility in the next section, ie things that a person in the position of acquiring the language might find difficult, and then discuss some evidence about differences in intuitions.

Use of Linguistic Information as Input.

Language input is the linguistic data used by language learners to confirm or disconfirm hypotheses about the rules of the language they are in the process of acquiring. Evidence from a number of types of research supports cognitive theories of L2 language acquisition which assume that the language learner uses input as part of an acquisition process. There is still a lot to discover about L2 acquisition, but there is some evidence for a natural order to the process which shows similarities with L1 acquisition.

Acquisition is usually considered as an unconscious process outside conscious control. However, it appears to be active rather than passive, in that individuals are selective of the language inputted, and, in the case of L2, is not restricted to natural communicative situations. Language used in both acts of communication in the L2 and during language instruction has been found to affect acquisition. Similar orders of acquisition have been found in some studies for L2 learners in natural settings and those in formal settings although research on the effects of classroom instruction have been limited.

Language in natural settings has been researched in terms of the way native speakers modify their speech when talking to children or foreigners. Research on "motherese", the language used by adults with young children, and "foreigner talk", the language used by native speakers to communicate with foreigners, indicates that speech in natural communication settings is tailored to judgments of the ability of the learner. The "mean length of an

utterance" (MLU) of a native speaker is affected by speakers' judgments as to the competence of the listener. MLU is increased for people judged to be more competent. In general, people tend to simplify their grammar and use only common lexical items when talking to children or foreigners. Input appears to facilitate rather than determine acquisition, and affects the rate of acquisition rather than the route (Ellis, 1988).

Research on the effects on acquisition of the L2 through instruction indicates that acquisition which takes place as a result of formal instruction follows a similar order to that occurring in a natural communication setting. This is so for both syntactic and morphological features (Ellis, 1988). However instruction seems to affect the acquisition of linguistically simple grammatical features but not that of the more complex ones. For example, L2 learners of English found it easier to acquire rules for the plural *s* morpheme than they did for the article *a* morpheme for which the rules are linguistically complex. For the progressive *-ing* form, instructed learners misused the form following instruction, whereas untutored learners acquiring the language in natural settings achieved greater accuracy (Pica, 1985).

Other research indicates that a learner's ability to understand language in a meaningful context exceeds the ability to understand decontextualised material (for detailed references, see Lightbown, 1985). There are also cases where a rule can be understood, but not used. This was found to be the case with French speakers of English with the possessive form *'s* (Lightbown, 1983).

Acquisition is therefore not a process which is restricted to informal communicative settings. It seems also to occur under classroom conditions where attention is being given to form rather than meaning. Linguistics classes are not intended to instruct L2 speakers in the language, but they do make students focus on language forms. These forms can contain quite complex grammatical structures which students are unlikely to have encountered in natural communicative settings or in the classroom. Students can encounter ungrammatical forms, ambiguous forms, and forms which are downright silly. If the student is in a state of actively acquiring the language and is using L2 data as input, it could make the study of linguistics a rather tedious and confusing process.

I have selected information from several standard texts for English grammar which are examples of sources of difficulty. These are all syntax texts, but they serve to illustrate the expectations of the writers about the students' knowledge. The first two sentences are taken from a standard text on English grammar. Both sentences have the same meaning. The sentences are quite complicated. They contain several subordinating clauses. The order of some of the elements has been changed in the second sentence. The subject "Vanessa" and the subject complement "my friend" have exchanged positions in the main clause and they are not separated by the subordinating clauses. This makes the sentence easier to follow for native speakers.

1 Vanessa, whose brother Jim likes to tell at great length how he used to play tennis with famous movie stars when he lived in Los Angeles, is my best friend.

1a My best friend is Vanessa, whose brother Jim likes to tell at great length how he used to play tennis with famous movie stars when he lived in Los Angeles.
(Quirk et al, 1985:1040).

Both these sentences are possible sentences of English and yet they are both difficult at first sight to understand. Both sentences might be encountered in a real communication situation, but it is unlikely that a classroom taught L2 speaker has come across this kind of complex structure in the classroom. In any case, having to focus on the differing comprehensibility of the two sentences is hard.

Other material which is presented to the student may be ill-formed, and used to illustrate the properties of acceptable language forms.

2 John killed the stone.
2a John killed Mary but she didn't die.
(Radford, 1988:16).

Both these sentences are grammatically well-formed. The first sentence here is said to be pragmatically anomalous. It is meaningless except in a special context where stones, which are normally considered to be inanimate, are alive, perhaps in a fairy tale. The second one is said to be semantically anomalous because it contains a contradiction. Such decontextualised forms could provide problems for L2 speakers. They would be required to judge on several different criteria for well-formedness, when they are probably only used to focussing on using the correct grammatical rules.

Yet other forms are presented which are not ill-formed but are unlikely to be employed in normal communication for stylistic reasons. The sentences below are used to illustrate the structure of nominal clauses. The first sentence shows a nominal finite clause functioning as the subject of a sentence.

3 That the season has started so early seems a pity.

The more usual form of this sentence involves the use of an "anticipatory subject", "it" with the nominal clause functioning as "postponed subject".

3a It seems a pity that the season has started so early.
(Greenbaum, 1991:113.)

Such information may be interesting and useful to native speaker students, but not necessarily for L2 speakers if both sentences are correct. Also, the answer to the question "What seems a pity?" for both sentences would be "That the season has started so early". So the first sentence is more transparent than the second one.

Students can also encounter syntactically ill-formed sentences that are very similar to well-formed sentences. The ill-formed sentence below shows that the perfective aspect cannot be used to represent past time when a particular time in the past is given.

4 *It is possible that I have left the keys at the office last night.
4a It is possible that I have left the keys at the office.
4b It is possible that I left the keys at the office last night.
(Quirk, 1985:191)

Native speakers would have no problem judging the well-formedness of the sentences presented here. An L2 speaker might also have acquired the rule for using the perfect aspect and its reference to time. But if that is not the case, then this particular information, presented out of context is easily misinterpreted because of the similarity between the three sentences.

One final problem is the use of examples of sentences which contain spurious grammatical errors. In English, there are certain constructions which were treated as ungrammatical by prescriptive grammarians when grammar was determined by comparisons of all languages with Latin and Greek. Some native speakers may still consider these things to be "bad grammar". For example there is the rule about the use of a "split infinitive". When I was taught English grammar, I was told not to use split infinitives in written English. Here is an example.

5 The mission of the USS Enterprise is to boldly go where no man has ever been before.
(Radford, 1988:46)

This type of sentence *is* well-formed and the "split infinitive" construction is also likely to occur in normal communication. It is better suited to the rhythmic constraints of English in certain contexts. Compare "It is important to genuinely understand your students' ideas" with "It is important to understand genuinely your students' ideas". So, it is simply misleading to tell foreign students that some people would consider it "bad grammar".

So far, we have looked at sentences from linguistic texts which might be considered difficult for an L2 speaker, who is possibly processing the information as input to an acquisition system. The use of these materials with L2 students can be criticised for four reasons, the first is that the student may be presented with forms which are too complex. Secondly, the judgments the student is required to make about well-formedness may be unfamiliar and difficult to judge from the second language. Thirdly, the student may be presented with confusing material which does not violate the rules of the language but is stylistically odd or has been considered badly formed, for reasons which have nothing to do with its linguistic properties. Fourthly, all the material has been presented out of context which makes its meaning difficult to judge.

These are a few possible difficulties that L2 students might find. In addition, some of the above sentences require that the student tests his or her intuitions about the language, for example sentences 3 and 3a, and sentences 4, 4a and 4b. This may be very misleading for L2 students because for various reasons their intuitions about the L2 can be different from native speakers. We will consider research on this in the next section.

The Problem of Different Intuitions

The differences between L2 speakers and native speakers of a language are normally visible at the level of phonology. This is an aspect of language which is most obviously subject to "fossilisation" among L2 learners. L2 speakers tend to have a foreign accent in their L2. It would therefore be expected that the intuitions about L2 phonology would be different from native speaker intuitions. We will consider some of the research on phonology later in this section. L2 grammar, on the other hand, can be judged as being intelligible or near-native like in its properties by native speakers of a language. This implies that grammatical intuitions might be

the same for both L2 and L1 learners. However, there is some research which has found different intuitions about grammar for native speakers and non-native speakers who have been judged as near-native in their control of grammar. Coppétiers (1987) has found that L2 speakers of French, from a variety of native language backgrounds, were found to have different intuitions about the grammatical forms they were using from the native speakers. For example, there were differences between native speaker French and non-native speakers for the use of the pronoun in the following sets of expressions:

6. Qui est Victor Hugo? *Il/C' est un grand écrivain du XIXième siècle.
Who is Victor Hugo? He is a great writer of the 19th century.
6a Je connais cette statue, elle/c' est le symbole de la paix.
I know this statue, it is the symbol of peace.
6b Tu vois ce type-la, *il/c' est l'idiot qui a renversé mon verre.
You see that guy over there, that's the idiot who spilled the contents of my glass.
Coppétiers, 1987:555)

In French, the neuter pronoun *ce* is used pronominally in anaphoric constructions with animate nouns when certain meanings are expressed. In sentence 6, it is obligatory to use *ce* because Victor Hugo is being identified. The same is the case for sentence 6b. In sentence 6a, either the gender-specific *elle* or the neuter *ce* could be used. However, for all the sentences, it is possible to use the alternative pronoun in special contexts. Native speakers were generally agreed on these forms, and their reasons for the use of the pronouns. But non-native speakers had different intuitions about the pronouns from native speakers. In general, *ce* was considered more informal than *il* or *elle*. It was assumed to be a "thing" pronoun rather than a "person" pronoun. *il* and *elle* were even assigned a literary status by some people and it was considered almost rude to use *ce*. However, all knew that there was a distinction between the pronouns, and interpreted a contrast between them. All the non-native speakers tested in the study were considered to be near-native in their use of French by native speakers.

In research on L2 phonology, some of the differences between native speakers and L2 learners are quite striking. There can be differences between production and perception of the second language. Some things which can be produced with a degree of similarity to native speakers cannot be perceived. Non-native adult speakers of English from a variety of linguistic backgrounds were found to perceive the English stops /p/ and /b/ continuously rather than categorically. Native speakers of English perceive them categorically. Production of the stops was similar to native speakers (Gass, 1984).

Categorical perception in phonology involves perception of phonetic changes in a sound property between phonological boundaries rather than within them. Native speakers of Mandarin Chinese have been found to perceive tone categorically (Gandour, 1978). Native speakers of English perceive the difference between voiced and voiceless stops categorically. This means that when presented with differences between sounds in one language, and being given a phonological reason for it, the L2 speakers may have their own reason which is different. For example, I hear the difference between the syllables [pʰa:] and [pa:] in Cantonese as being the same as the difference between the syllables [pʰa:] and [ba:] in English. My

reason for hearing a difference in the two consonants would be different from a Cantonese person's reason.

In some of my own unpublished research with Cantonese speakers of English, I found that the Cantonese speakers were retrieving English words from memory differently from native speakers. They were required to retrieve words in a sentence context which were cued with a word which was phonological error which was similar to the target word for that context. Native speakers of English found it easier to recall a word which had the same first consonant and the same stress pattern as the error word, eg "fictional" from the cue "functional", in the following sentence.

Books about people who don't really exist are functional.

But the Cantonese speakers could recall words which shared the same stress pattern without having the same segmental structure. For example, they were able to retrieve the word "meditation" from the following sentence. The native speakers had difficulty retrieving target words which only had the stress pattern in common with the error word.

She found the practices of certain eastern religions very relaxing and never missed her morning transgression.

It is possible (but not proven) that the Chinese speakers use English word stress as some kind of tonal element. This suggests that Cantonese speakers could have a different reason for distinguishing between words of different stress patterns from native speakers of English.

I had interesting responses when discussing word stress rules for English with Cantonese students in tutorials. I asked students if they could identify a syllable that had secondary stress in the word "kaleidoscope". Some linguists would claim that there is a secondary stress on the syllable "scope". The students were able to identify the primary stress immediately on the syllable "lei". But some of them guessed the secondary stress was on the syllable "ka" because it was a different pitch. This again suggests that they have different reasons for distinguishing between words phonologically from native speakers.

Phonology texts like grammar texts assume native speaker intuitions in their readers. This could pose problems for foreign speakers learning the linguistics of the language. It also means that L2 intuitions based on the characteristics of their native language are not properly examined unless the teacher makes a point of examining them. In the following section, I will outline some proposals for teaching linguistics to L2 students so that their L2 can be made into an advantage and a teaching aid instead of being a potential handicap to understanding.

Some proposals for teaching linguistics of a second language to non-native Students.

The research reported above is not concerned directly with the effects of teaching linguistics to L2 students. It would be difficult, among a given group of L2 students to judge whether they were processing information presented to them as input, or whether their knowledge had fossilised at a certain point. Also individual variation in acquisition and knowledge would make it difficult to assess intuitions. If students all come from the same

native language background, as students do in Hong Kong, it will be possible to predict some of the possible effects of the native language on their L2 knowledge and behaviour. However, the following hints might be useful, and are probably already being attempted by teachers of linguistics.

Inform students their knowledge of the second language will not necessarily be improved by learning about it from standard texts.

It might seem from the discussion above of the examples of the text book materials, that materials used by native speakers should not be used by the L2 speakers, because the knowledge of the L2 speakers is at variance with the assumptions underlying some of the judgments expressed. However, that means you would be depriving students of an educational opportunity. They can hardly understand transformational grammar without reading Chomksy's ideas. Quirk's grammar of English is the most thorough grammatical analysis we have of English. So the texts should be used where possible. It seems only fair, however, to inform the students that the texts may be difficult to follow, and that their competence in the language will not be improved by learning facts about it. In fact, it might have the opposite effect.

Try to set up courses which enable comparisons of the linguistic characteristics of the native language and the second language to be made.

Include references to the properties of the native language in linguistics courses to L2 speakers, particularly in phonology courses. This could generate discussions about the rules of their own language, and get them interested in the L2 and in their own competence and the differences and similarities with native speaker competence.

Try to use material which is familiar to the student.

If the students are presented with examples of things they know already, they will not be discouraged from examining the language for the rules. This probably means working with students to discover what they do and don't know. Some of the tasks which language teachers employ could be used. For example, students could be asked to make up their own noun phrases or verb phrases rather than just judging the materials in their textbooks.

Get students to make up their own incorrect constructions with reasons why they think they are incorrect. This has a two-fold benefit. It makes the students activate their own knowledge and it helps the teacher to find out what the students' knowledge is. As preparation for this paper, I experimented on myself. I made up error sentences in French, and their correct versions, to see if I could judge the rule that was being broken. Then I passed the sentences on to a native speaker teacher of French to see if I had been correct in my assumptions. The sentences and his corrections are printed overleaf.

It is many years since I learned French, and I do not know much about the linguistics. So this seemed something like the position L2 learners could find themselves in, when they first join a linguistics class. It was interesting to find that there were things which I *knew* to be wrong in French, but did not give the same feeling of being wrong as an incorrect expression in English.

This kind of exercise can help teachers to find out what students know and can help students to become more aware of their own knowledge of the language. The feeling of personal control over the knowledge might help to lessen the effects of being taught the language through an external authority for those students who have had mainly classroom instruction.

Conclusions

The concern of this paper was the teaching of the linguistics of the L2 in the L2 medium. Research on L2 processing indicates that non-native speakers of a second language may have special problems dealing with the structure of the L2. They could be in the process of acquisition while they are trying to learn about the language. Also their intuitions about the language may be different from native speakers. It could be possible for teachers of the linguistics of the L2 to use techniques which take advantage of the differences, and increase the students' awareness of their L2 knowledge.

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Examples of incorrect (E) sentences in French with corrected (T) versions.
My ideas of the rule are written underneath.
Native French speaker's comments written in bold underneath my comments.

Je va chez moi. (Error sentence (E))
Je vais chez moi. (Target sentence (T))
I am going home.
Verb agrees with subject in terms of person.

J'aime la blanc maison. (E)
J'aime la maison blanche. (T)
I like the white house.
Adjective agrees in gender with the noun it modifies. "maison" is a feminine noun. Also the masculine form of the adjective "blanc" precedes the noun while the feminine form follows it. **case by case rather than a rule.**
c'est un grand homme (great)
c'est un homme grand (tall)
J'aime les hommes grands!
J'aime les grandes femmes!

Il n'y a pas des pommes dans le jardin. (E)
Il n'y a pas de pommes dans le jardin. (T)
There aren't any apples in the garden.
When the indefinite article occurs with a plural noun which follows a negative form of the verb, it does not agree in number with the noun, as it would in the case of a positive verb
"Il y a des pommes dans le jardin".
There are apples in the garden.
You also say "pas de bière"
"pas de bruit"
it's always de or d' after a negative

Il a allé à la gare. (E)
Il est allé à la gare. (T)
He has gone to the station.
Some verbs of motion have the verb "to be" as part of the perfect aspect not the verb "to have".

Voici est la cuisine. (E)
Voici la cuisine. (T)
Here is the kitchen.
"Voici" translates into English as "here is" not "here".

Ma soeur est aussi mon ami. (E)
Ma soeur est aussi mon amie. (T)
My sister is also my friend.
The French word for sister, "soeur" is a feminine noun, so the word for friend, "amie" must also be feminine. **and it's "mon" and nct "ma" because before a vowel.**

Il lavait ses mains. (E)
Il se lavait les mains. (T)
He was washing his hands.
Reflexive verbs are used to describe things done to one's own body rather than the personal pronoun as used in English.